



Housing Futures

South East Web

David Griffiths

2018

Governance Adviser/Officer, SouthEast Housing Co-operative Ltd 2005-2015 and former Secretary of Co-operatives Australia and Co-operatives Victoria

The SouthEast Housing Co-operative is a housing co-operative based in Dandenong, Victoria, Australia.

It is the largest rental housing co-operative in Victoria with 166 properties – 14 owned by the co-operative and 152 managed for the State Government Director of Housing. The properties are primarily in the South and East of Melbourne.

According to the Victorian Housing Registrar records on 12 May 2018, for the last financial year (not specified) key statistics for the co-operative included:

Assets \$4,920,203

Turnover \$1,949,758

Operating Surplus \$281,106

Staff 6

The SouthEast Housing Co-operative Ltd, therefore, has succeeded in providing affordable housing and remain financially viable.

In 2012 the SouthEast Housing Co-operative Ltd was a lead co-operative in Australia's contribution to the United Nations International Year of Co-operatives – a film on the co-operative, a series of Co-operation in Practice films with Co-operatives Victoria and the UK Co-operative College, the publication Co-operators - Co-operation and Co-operatives, sponsorship of Common Equity Housing's national housing co-operative conference and a donation to the Australian IYC Secretariat.

This paper considers the content of the co-operative's web site based on a factual comparison of the difference in 2015 and 2018.

<http://www.sehc.org.au>

The reasons for an organization establishing a web site including the following – cost effectiveness as it is the least expensive form of advertising and marketing, accessibility 24/7/365, reaching new audiences that cannot be reached in other ways, complementing the other activities and keeping up with and ahead of competitors and relationship-building with customers or members and the public.

According to the Our Community Pty Ltd publication **How To Stand Out From The Crowd – The complete marketing and media handbook for a community organisation** (2010) "Your community group simply must have a web site." (p 113)

The subsequent analysis is based on as assumption that web sites are critical to the identity and communication policies and practices of organization such as a co-operative. Others may have a contrary view on the significance of a web site.

No judgement is made about the differences between 2015 and 2018 web sites. A co-operative has the right to determine the content of its own web site and to make any change to the organization, design and content that are considered necessary. In highlighting these differences there is no implied and/or explicit criticism and no implied and/or direct suggestion of which content is superior and/or inferior.

The contrast is between the content of the web site in 2015 and 2018. The author of this paper David Griffiths was responsible for the content of the web site up to and including 2015. It was in 2017 that the web site was changed to what it is in 2018.

A web site is important for a business because it can be used to reflect the brand identity of the business – the values and ideals that you want people to associate with the business. Ideally, then, a web site should be aligned with the brand identity of the business. A business can, of course, change its brand identity and, therefore, change, its web site.

A business that is registered as a co-operative, such as the SouthEast Housing Co-operative Ltd, does so because the co-operative model is based on explicit values and principles as identified by the International Co-operative Alliance. If these values and principles are meaningful to the co-operative, then, they are reflected and reinforced in the behaviour and activities of a co-operative – including its web site.

If these values and principles are not reflected and reinforced in a co-operative's web site, then, the co-operative's commitment to these values and principles are at least questionable and opens the broader issue of how the overall behaviour and activities of a co-operative reflect and reinforce these values and principles. Of course, it is arguable how these co-operative values and principles are reflected and reinforced by a co-operative but, then, simply affirming the values and principles is not in itself self-evident of a co-operation practice.

This is, of course, an expression of bias – that a co-operative's activities, including its web site, should reflect and reinforce co-operative values and principles. What is the point of a co-operative if it does not reflect and reinforce co-operative values and principles? In the past, for example, SouthEast has engaged a co-operative business consultant, Chris Cooper, from the UK Co-operative College – because his consultancy was based on co-operative values and principles.

The following table summarise the content of the SouthEast Housing Co-operative Ltd web site in 2015 and 2018:

Features		2015	2018
Annual Report	Annual Report of the co-operative is its most important public document.	All Annual Reports from 2010-11	Limited number of copies available. Four from 2013-14 up until 2016-17.
Co-operative Marque	A logo developed by the International Co-operative Alliance in 2013 to be used by co-operatives to identify with the global co-operatives movement.	Used throughout the site from 213 until 2017.	Not used
Co-operative Values and Principles	The international Co-operative alliance has formally endorsed a set of co-operative values and principles to define and guide co-operative practice.	Included	Not included
Housing Futures newsletter	The co-operative newsletter published since 2010.	All copies available since published in 2010.	Limited number of copies available – from 2015.
Rules of co-operative	The Rules of the co-operative are adopted by members at General Meetings of the co-operative.	Published	Published
General Meeting Minutes	Minutes of the primary decision-making body in a co-operative.	Published	No longer published.
Strategic Plan	The Strategic Plan establishes the goal of the co-operative and performance indicators. Up until 2015 at least the Strategic Plan was developed and reviewed by the board and subsequently endorsed by a general meeting of the co-operative.	Full copy published including detailed performance indicators and comparison with recent years and similar housing agencies.	Summary published with no indicators and comparisons.
Policies	Policies adopted by General Meetings of the co-operative.	Member Manual – Rights and Responsibilities published with all policies	Selective policies published
Web site statistics	Statistics on web site visits and visitors from which	Available on site and regularly updated Statistics for the web	Not available

	countries to the various pages.	site from 2012 until June 2015 – visitors 9023, visits 11,634 and page views 35,677.			
Special publications: The Phoenix – The SouthEast Housing Co-operative Ltd (2010) and Co-operators – Co-operation and Co-operatives (2012)	Booklets published by the co-operative.	Available with cover image that includes author and editor David Griffiths	Available with cover image that excludes author and editor David Griffiths		
Reviews of co-operative by Housing Registrar	These are individual annual reports undertaken by the Victorian Housing Registrar on all housing agencies.	SouthEast individual report published and available on the web site – February 2012, January 2013, January 2014 and November 2014 SouthEast was the only registered agency that provided its review to members and the public.	No longer available		
Public Records of board meetings	In 2011 the board decided to publish public records of board meetings – a selective summary of board minutes.	All included since 2011	All included since 2011		
Services Charter	The Services Charter was developed by the board and subsequently adopted by a General Meeting of members up to and including 2015.	Available	Not available		
Twitter	Established March 2013. Articles posted to web site were linked from Twitter.	289 tweets and 516 followers. Last tweet 10 January 2016.	No longer used.		
YouTube - Internal	Three SouthEast videos were produced in 2012 - The Other Way Home, The Other Way Home teaser and Co-operation Works.	Accessible through web site.	No longer accessible through web site.		
You Tube - Collaborative	In 2012 SouthEast with Co-operatives Victoria and Co-operative College UK produced eight <table border="1"><tr><td>Co-operation in Practice videos featuring the</td><td>Available</td></tr></table>	Co-operation in Practice videos featuring the	Available	Linked from the web site.	No longer available.
Co-operation in Practice videos featuring the	Available				

	Principal and Chief Executive Officer of the College Mervyn Wilson – principles, Governance, values, Education, directors, membership, Social Enterprises and International. A 2012 co-production of SouthEast, Co-operatives Victoria and the UK Co-operative College.			
Co-operative News – internal and external	Reports on surveys and general meetings and housing and welfare news.	Approximately 289 items published between 2013 and January 2016.	Infrequent with four items – including two SEHC publications from 2010 and 2012.	
Latest News	Up to date news.	Regularly updated.	Infrequent with four items – including two SEHC publications from 2010 and 2012.	
Member Login	A member only section of a web site only available to members.	Not provided	To be provided but under construction.	
Search	Allows search of site.	Yes	No	
Updating of site	How regularly the content is updated.	Weekly or fortnightly updates with dates.	Irregular and no dates provided to assess when and what has been updated.	

Any errors in the differences identified are accidental and not intentional and evidence-based correction would be welcome.

It is not the purpose of this paper to speculate on who has decided what and why the content has been changed since 2017. This is an internal matter for the co-operative.

Examining the content of the web site is different from the design and organization of the site. The 2018 design and organizing is in my opinion superior to the 2015 site – except there is no search feature.

It is not possible, of course, to determine the decision-making process and the decision-makers who determine the content, design and organization of a web site. This would require disclosure by the co-operative. Up to and including 2015 the design, organization and content of the web site was determined by the Governance Adviser/Officer and the General Manager with input from the board and individual directors.

It is not possible, for example to determine why the International Co-operative Alliance's Co-operative Marque is now not included on the web site. It was either a deliberate decision to no longer identify with the international co-operative movement, not recognising the significance of the marque, a design and organization decision that did not resolve how to use the marque or an oversight.

Content is the ultimate determinate of the relevance of a web site – not its design and organization. Content is the substance of a web site and it needs to be regularly updated – unless the emphasis is on style rather than substance and are indifferent to search engines and visitors and their behaviour. Design and organization attract visitors, but it is content that retains visitors and their visits. If a stylistic web site is basically static with no or minimum updates, then, search engine activity and visitor visits will be minimal. The success of a web site can be measured through web site statistics that measure number of visits, visitors, and pages viewed. Until 2015 these statistics were reported on the web site. The Our Community Pty Ltd publication *How To Stand Out From The Crowd – The complete marketing and media handbook for a community organisation* (2010) has concluded that style over substance will not work for a web site – content is king.

Questions about the SouthEast Housing Co-operative Ltd 2015 and 2018 web sites could include the following:

How do they reflect and reinforce the internationally recognised co-operative values and principles?

What is the brand identity of the co-operative?

Do they accurately reflect and reinforce the brand identity of the co-operative?

What do they reflect about the brand identity of SouthEast and do they reflect different identities and, if so, in what way?

What is the purpose of the web site and has this changed?

What information does the web site provide?

Is the site trying to explain and/or inform and/or persuade?

Does the content follow basic grammar, spelling and composition?

How often is the web site updated?

The answers will, of course, be viewed differently depending on personal values and principles. There is no right and wrong answer.

But, then, if you are indifferent about the need for and purpose of a web site you may not be interested in the questions – and, therefore, the answers.

Other publications by David Griffiths:

The Phoenix Reborn, 2015

<https://archive.org/details/PhoenixRebornGriffiths2015>

Co-operator Ian McLaren (1947-2015), 2017

<https://archive.org/details/HousingCooperatorIanMcLaren2017>

Co-operators – Co-operation and Co-operatives, Editor, SouthEast Housing Co-operative Ltd, 2014

Housing Futures Editor between 2011 -2015, SouthEast Housing Co-operative Ltd

The Phoenix – the SouthEast Housing Co-operative Ltd, Southeast Housing Co-operative Ltd, 2010

SEHC Publication	Cover Images 2015 Web Site	Cover Images 2018 Web Site
The Phoenix		



International Co-operative Alliance

Values and Principles



A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Co-operatives are businesses owned and run by and for their members. Whether the members are the customers, employees or residents they have an equal say in what the business does and a share in the profits.

As businesses driven by values not just profit, co-operatives share internationally agreed principles and act together to build a better world through co-operation.

The International Co-operative Alliance is an independent, non-governmental organisation established in 1895 to unite, represent and serve co-operatives worldwide. The Alliance provides a global voice and forum for knowledge, expertise and co-ordinated action for and about co-operatives.

In 1995, the Alliance adopted the revised Statement on the Co-operative Identity which contains the definition of a co-operative, the values of co-operatives, and the seven co-

operative principles as described below. You can also consult the [Guidance Notes on the Co-operative Principles and Values](#) which give detailed guidance and advice on the practical application of the Principles to co-operative enterprise.

Co-operative values

Co-operatives are based on the values of **self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity** and **solidarity**. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Co-operative Principles

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

3. Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4. Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

5. Education, Training and Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6. Co-operation among Co-operatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. Concern for Community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

